

I would like to thank the Chairs, Senator Coleman and Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Kissel and Representative Hetherington and other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to speak in support of H.B. 6599, An Act Concerning Discrimination.

My name is Tasha Schaedler and I am a 15 year old Avon High School Student. I am here to speak on behalf of my legal guardian Jerimarie Liesegang and all other transgender people everywhere, but from a teenager's point of view. As a teenager living with my mother Anja and Jerimarie, you may think that I have been corrupted by Jerimarie, or influenced by her. I will swear that everything I say is of my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences, if it pleases you.

I should probably start with a little background. I lived with my grandparents for nine or more years since I was either three or four. They were Catholic, extremely straight, and had no love for anything out of the ordinary, including the LGBT community. My father is the same way, as is my stepmother. Sadly, they have no love for Jerimarie because she is "different." While a custody issue for my two brothers and I was in full swing, my father and stepmother did everything in their power to stop me from going to live with my mother because she lived with a transgender. However, that notion failed. Come August, I will have lived with Mom and Jerimarie for three years.

Let me tell you that I am still the same person I have always been, although my life skills have improved thanks to Mom and Jerimarie. Jerimarie is a great help with my math and science homework if there's something I don't understand. She is an astounding woman who has done so much for the community and state, but she doesn't get the recognition and respect she deserves.

In school at the moment, there is no protection for those in the LGBT community. It is not as common in Avon schools as in other places, but those who identify themselves outside the normal male- female "straight" community still get hassled and bullied, or talked about behind their backs. One day in school, we had the comedian Michael Pritchard come to our school. He pointed directly at the boys, and said, "Guys, one in every ten of your friends is probably gay." The response? Laughter. Mocking laughter and disbelief. Only when he started making bullies and bullying victims come up did they realize how common it is, even in our school. Even still, I know of only two friends, both girls, who observe the April 16<sup>th</sup> Day of Silence for the LGBT in the school. For the Civic Virtues Project, which is required of all taking Civics and American Government, I decided that I would advertise an idea to make Avon High School a no- bullying zone for the LGBT community, if the idea is approved by my teacher. I also try to advertise the Transgender Lives conference, which is coming up at the end of April, to the faculty and seniors, since they are the ones old enough to go without interfering with TrueColors. In fact, my workshop for the conference is "Living with a Transgender: Life Through a Teenager's Eyes," one that I also gave last year.

I will admit that the first time I met Jerimarie, I was a nervous wreck because I had no idea what she would be like. But as the court got closer to making its decision, we spent a lot of time together. I found out that she was an amazing person with a vast amount of knowledge and wisdom, but she also liked to have fun, too. My homework math problems gave her a good challenge to her scientifically analytical brain, and we take time to play games or go out to dinner, even.

There was a time, when it was considered dangerous to give women an education. There was a time, when giving African Americans freedom was ridiculed. Now it is decreed that all men and women shall be free and given an equal education. They are protected from harassment, bullying, and ridicule. Now it is your time. You must decide what you want the future for your children to be. Do you want them to be afraid of the LGBT community because those people are different? It's like saying you want your child to be afraid of a zebra because it has stripes and a horse doesn't. Remember, it is *your* time. You are deciding the future for me and my peers. What do you want to see the future as being?

Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Thank you,  
Tasha Schaedler